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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly defines the nature of economic development, describes the various conferences and seminars which have been held to discuss library problems pertaining to Africa, discusses the types of programs and activities that African libraries must engage in if they are to contribute effectively to economic development, reviews the role of UNESCO and other international organizations in developing programs for the transfer and dissemination of scientific and technical information within Africa, and examines the specific problems pertaining to the availability of books and adequately-trained library professionals in Africa as these affect the ability of libraries to contribute to economic development. A 15-item reference list accompanies the text. (JL)

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LIBRARIES AS A MEANS TO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA

by

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Tanzania Library Service
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Libraries as Means to Economic Transformation in Africa

By Ezekiel E. Kaungamno

Director of Tanzania Library Services.

Economically, African countries and their Asian and Latin friends have been given various names. They have been labelled as "emerging". "underdeveloped", "backward", "least industrialized", "developing", "least developed" and "countries belonging to the "Third" and 4th world.

All this implies that the majority of African countries experience a low standard of living, relative to the standard of living enjoyed by most people in "developed" countries. From the library development point of view, also African countries are underdeveloped.

For the purpose of the present discussions, economic transformation is assumed to result in economic development which brings about economic growth and progress as well as economic welfare for the people.

However, a word of caution is in order here. We are reminded by Professor W. Arthur Lewis that "the advantage of economic growth is not that wealth increases happiness but that it increases the range of human choice. It is very hard to correlate wealth and happiness. Happiness results from the way one looks at life, taking it as it comes... Wealth would increase happiness if it increased resources more than it increased wants but it does not necessarily do this, and there is no evidence that the rich are happier than the poor, or that individuals grow happier as their incomes increase. Wealth decreases happiness if in the acquisition of wealth one ceases to take life as it comes and worries more about resources and the future. There is evidence of much greater mental distrubance in the United States of American than there is in other countries even when allowance is made for differences in statistical reporting... We certainly cannot say that an increase in wealth makes people happier. We cannot say, either, that an increase in wealth makes people less happy." All we can say about economic growth is that "it gives man greater control over his environment, and hereby increases his freedom."

That libraries are vital means to economic transformation of African countries, or other countries for that matter is accepted. That they contribute to the educational, social and economic development of a country is a fact which unfortunately is difficult to substantiate quantitatively.

However Economists such as Alfred Marshall, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, John Vaizey, Frederick Harbison, Charles Myers, Simon Kuznets and Theodore Shultz to mention only a few names, have found that there is a close relationship between investment in manpower and economic growth as measured by the Gross National Product. Libraries should therefore be seen as investment in personal and community development as they can help equip good citizens capable of responding and adapting to changing and challenging conditions.

The history of library movement in Africa is comparatively short. In 1946 when Unesco was founded there were only two independent states in Africa South of the Sahara. There were Libena and Ethiopia. The rest of the continent was under colonial rule and in fact right up to 1955 more than four-fifths of the African population was under European rule. In 1953 when the Ibadan Seminar was organized, out of the twenty nine Librarians and educators who participated in the Seminar only eight were Africans. Thus when we talk about the role of libraries in the economic transformation of Africa we have to consider, among other things, this important historial factor.

When the Enugu Seminar was organized in 1962 the situation in African was different. Africa of 1962 was no longer that of 1953. In 1962 for example twenty six out of the thirty seven participants were Africans. Thus after independence African countries began to take interest in the establishment of libraries.

However the role of libraries in economic development has not been fully appreciated. Probably with the exception of special libraries, non-recognition of the importance of libraries is due to the fact that the contribution to society is indirect. "Government are inclined to look askance at schemes which involve heavy recurrent expenditure; they have to be convinced that libraries are a social and economic necessity and that money spent on libraries pays a dividend by way of their contribution to the national knowledge which in turn contributes to the national prosperity."[2]

What is forgotten or overlooked is the fact that library and documentation services enable professional and scientific personnel to keep up-to-date with their subjects; the industrial and agricultural system is regularly fed with relevant, up-to-date information. Access to current scientific and technological information is essential for economic progress. Some of the problems facing developing countries are lack of research in support of young industries and the machinery for transmitting research results to these industries.

What measures ought to be taken to ensure that libraries play an effective role in the economic transformation of African countries?

Various conferences, mainly sponsored by Unesco, have been held to discuss library problems pertaining to African countries. A cursory survey of some of the recommendations regarding the economic role of libraries is pertinent here.

At the Ibadan Seminar (1953) sponsored by Unesco, it was recommended that by 1970, public library services should have been spending a sum equal to 1 per cent of the national budget on education and that by 1980 the proportion should be 2 per cent. It was envisaged that his amount would provide efficient library services consonant with national educational development except in poorer countries, where the proportion would need to be about 4 per cent.[3]

The Unesco sponsored Enugu Seminar of 1962 recommended that the annual expenditure on libraries by 1970 should have amounted to about 1 per cent of the annual expenditure in the country on education (primary and secondary) and by 1980 to about 2 per cent of such expenditure. Those African countries whose annual average per capita income was less than /100 should have aimed to spend on public library services by 1970 about 2 per cent of the annual expenditure in the country on education and by 1980 about 4 per cent of such expenditure.[4]

At the 1970 Unesco Regional Conference in Kampala for librarians and documentalists from twelve African countries, costs were estimated in relation to the cost of the total education expenditure. It was recommended that library services should spend 4.9% and 7.3% of the total educational expenditure in 1980 for the moderate and high targets, compared with 2.9% for 1976.[5]

With these big financial commitments, libraries can play an effective role in economic transformation if they are to be indispensable sources of valuable information rather than just distributing centres;

otherwise African Governments will neglect them and give high priority to projects which have direct economic impact. More and more emphasis should be given to dissemination of the right information to those who need it at the right time. In other words, "librarianship in depth" or documentation should be top priority activities in libraries.

However in order to give effective information service there is an urgent need for cooperation among libraries. P. H. Sewell, Senior Library Adviser to the Department of Education and Science, England, has pointed out that there are four main reasons for cooperation.[6]

> First the expansion of knowledge and of the records of knowledge is making it less possible for the individual library to acquire all the materials necessary to meet special needs of its users. Second, with the escalation of prices of library materials, the resources available to an individual institution or service make it less possible each year to meet those needs from its own resources. Third, we now have the potentialities of mechanized services both in relation to library housekeeping routines and in relation to mechanized bibliographical information services, together with the pressure for standardization of techniques and for cooperative action which such developments bring in their train. A fourth factor is that, with higher levels of education becoming more readily available, and with the broadening of interests and sophistication of thought brought about by the modern range of mass communication; it is becoming less possible to categoriza public libraries as serving in the main people of limited intellectural range and ability.

Libraries can still play a more effective economic role if they are coordinated with documentation centres and archives. This, as we all know, is in essence the concept behind NATIS (national Information Systems). The Unesco's Intergevernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures held in Paris in 1974 resolved that libraries, documentation centres and archives, which are indispensable sources of information, should be planned in a coordinated manner to avoid duplication of resources and to maximize the use of all relevant information vital for the social and economic development of a country. At this juncture it is appropriate to note the following conferences which have endorsed the NATIS concept - the 1973 Nairobi Conference on "Development of Documentation and Information Networks in East Africa organized by the East African Academy in cooperation with the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and sponsored by Unesco; the 1975 Accra Conference of African Librarians on the "Future of Library Systems in Africa" organized by the Ghana Library Board, the Ghana Library Association in cooperation with Unesco; and the 1976 Brazzaville Meeting of Experts on Planning Documentation and Library Networks in Africa.

From the economic standpoint, the efficient manimization of information for use requires a central planning body backed by legislation whose main functions should be:

(i) to prepare and to cost a coordinated development plan for all types of libraries within the national plan;

(ii) to harmonize the allocation for resources for library development, both from internal and external sources and

(iii) to establish national standards for efficient running of library services of all kinds.

However it is important to point out that there is no hard and fast rule as to the form and nature of the coordinating body. There is need to allow for flexibility in accordance with each country's circumstances. For example at the 1975 Accra Meeting referred to earlier, it was recommended that "National Information Systems Commissions should be established in all African countries to plan its objectives" and that the National Information Systems Commission should not be part of any existing information agency but should be independent so that it can coordinate information effectively. The 1976 Brazzaville Meeting noted the Accra recommendation and its limited application and consequent urged that it was up to each African country to decide on the name of the coordinating body and whether or not it should be part of an existing information agency.

Efficient dissemination of information calls for a properly planned national information policy, reflecting the needs of all sectors of the community, and of the national community as a whole. Such policy will guide the establishment of a national information plan, whose elements (libraries, documentation centres and archives) should be fully incorporated in the national development plans. The planning of documentation, information and library services requires, in the first place, an analysis of the priorities of a country's economic, social and scientific development. While no absolute model can be suggested to determine priorities in the main fields covered by the documentation, information and library system, the following have a dominant position in developing countries: science and technology (Mainly information for industry), economy, agriculture, public health and education. 8 For the purpose of this paper, the fields of public health and education will not be discussed.

The contribution of science and technology to economic development cannot be over-emphasized. Science, as it may be recalled is man's organized attempt, through the objective study of empirical phenomena, to discover how things work as causal systems. In other words, science can be described as "know why". Technology, however, is knowledge that relates directly to the production or improvement of goods or services. In brief, technology pertains to "know how".

Unesco has organized a series of regional meetings in Africa on problems relating to science and technology. It is appropriate here to note some of the conferences. By 1974 the following major conferences had been held;9

(i) 28 July - 6 August, 1964 - Lagos International Conference on the Organization of Research and Training in Africa in relation to the Study Conservation and Utilization of National Resources. (Organized by Unesco in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa).

(ii) 10 - 21 July, 1967 - Yaounde - Symposium on Science Policy and Research Administration in Africa.

(iii) 16 - 27 July, 1968 - Nairobi - Conference on Education and Scientific and Technical Training in relation to Development in Africa. (Covered jointly by Unesco and the Organization of African Unity in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

(iv) 5 - 16 October, 1970. Addis Ababa. Regional Symposium on the Utilization of Science and Technology for Development in Africa. (Organized by Unesco and the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa.

(v) 21 - 30 January, 1974 - Dakar. The Conference of Ministers for African States responsible for the Application of Science and Technology to Development (CASTAFRICA) - (Organized by Unesco with the cooperation of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity).

The 1974 CASTAFRICA made significant recommendations some of which are that:[10]

(i) Member States, taking into account national demand for Research and Development, (R & D) should increase their annual expenditure on R & D and support scientific and technological public services so as to attain, if possible before 1980, the target figure of a minimum of 1% their Gross National Product as proposed by the United Nations Conference on the Application of Science and Technology (UNACAST) for the Benefit of the Less Developed Areas.

(ii) African countries, in selecting new technologies, should take into consideration the size of the country and the level of its technological development and import only those which are best suited to local conditions.

(iii) All possible efforts should be made by African Member States to create and strengthen scientific and technical documentation centres and support the Unisist programme.

The World Science Information System[11] which was launched by Unesco in 1973 is essentially concerned with the transfer of science and technology on an international scale. UNISIST is an acronym for UN Information System in Science and Technology. The Division of scientific and Technical Information and Documentation with the Science Sector of Unesco, is responsible among other things for development of scientific and documentation centres in developing countries. For the purpose of implementing UNISIST, Member States should establish the following:

(i) UNISIST National Focal Point - a governmental or government-chartered policy making body at the national level whose responsibilities are to guide, stimulate and coordinate the development of information resources and services of national, regional and international cooperation.

(ii) UNISIST National Committee - a Committee whose duty is to advise the national focal point and other cooperating organizations on all aspects of participation in UNISIST.

In developing countries, particularly in Africa, the National Committee may be helpful in providing guidance in identifying priority needs for aid from UNDP and other funds and in coordinating the approaches for funds nationally, regionally and internationally; also the Committee may give advise to UNISIST on problems of developing modern information services in Africa, especially on the purposes for which consultants are required.

With regard to information for industry, The United Nations Industrial Development Organizations (UNIDO)[12] plays a vital role. UNIDO has initiated an Industrial Information Service (IIS) to provide practical assistants to developing countries by answering without charge, their inquiries arising from problems of industrialization. The service provides on request, lists of supplies of industrial equipment and gives advice on prices, quality of material, conditions of delivery and payment, drawing up of specifications and requests made through competent national authorities, UNIDO sends out consultants.

Agriculture, being the economic mainstay of African countries, is a priority sector. The Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) has developed an International Information System for Agricultural Sciences and Technology, or AGRIS[13] whose purpose is to index all agricultural information available in the world through the cooperation of Member States. The development of AGRIS Tropical is particularly relevant to African countries as it is concerned with documentation network designed to process information in the agricultural field in the tropical areas of the world. Other useful services run by FAO are CARIS (Computerized Agricultural Research Information System) and AGLINET (Agricultural Libraries Network). The organization is also responsible for setting up agricultural Documentation Centres.

One more important international information service in the field of economics ought to be mentioned. It is DEVSIS,[14] an acronym for Development Sciences Information System. In 1974, representatives from 34 national and international instituttions met in Ottawa to study a proposal dealing with the establishment of an international information system in the field of economic and social development. The proposal which is co-sponsored by IDRC, ILO, OECD, UNDP, UNESCO and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is directed towards meeting the information needs of planners and policy makers in the developing countries and the development research community.

I have outlined some of the major international information systems or networks to emphasize the importance of libraries, documentation centres and archives, being linked to them if they are to have an effective role in the economic transformation of African countries. Priority must first be given to the efficient organization of national and regional information networks in that order. Otherwise full use cannot be made of international information flow. All the time it must be borne in mind that emphasis should be given to the brokerage of information so that technical and scientific language is put in the form that the user can understand. This is the only way information can have the intended impact.

This paper will be incomplete if nothing is said about manpower and book production which are vital factors in the transformation process.

The 1953 Ibadan Seminar recommended, among other things that a limited number of library schools of high calibre be established in Africa to provide full scale professional training. At present there are no less than six schools of librarianship in Anglo-phone African countries South of the Sahara - excluding of course South Africa. However there are only two schools for archivists for both Francophone and Anglo-phone African Countries - one in Dakar and another in Accra. There are already indications that these schools are far from meeting the continental needs for high-level manpower. Most of the present librarians, documentalists and archivists have been trained overseas. The Comparative advantages and disadvantages of overseas training as opposed to home-training have been debated for a long time. John Dean has summed up the situation very well and it is appropriate here to refresh our minds with the pros and cons. Some of the advantages of overseas training are:[15]

1. The broadening experience of travel
2. The award of a qualification that is universally acceptable
3. A diversity of libraries (also documentation centres and archives) for field work and demonstration purposes, facilities which are all too often lacking in emergent countries.

Some of the disadvantages associated with overseas training are as follows:

1. Standards in the library schools (as well as documentation centres and archives) of metropolitan countries vary enormously.

2. Education in the metropolitan countries often fails to place the emphasis specifically where it is required by the student from the developing countries.

There is undoubtedly a great need for setting up more schools for librarians, documentalists and archivists in Africa bearing in mind that these schools should work in close association each specializing in a particular field in order to avoid wasteful duplication. In particular the future trend should be to train the three categories of professionals for information work emphasizing some of the following aspects:-

(i) the role of information in Society
(ii) methodology for determining users' needs
(iii) existing information resources
(iv) Information networks
(v) marketing of information for users
(vi) storage, retrieval and dissemination of information, particularly selective dissemination of information (SDI)

The shortage of books is a great impediment to the economic transformation of Africa. As the demand cannot be met by publishers in Africa the majority of books have to be imported. This, of course, results in the use of hard earned foreign exchange reserves on the part of African countries. Moreover, the imported books are by no means always suited to the aspirations of African people; as such outside supplies can therefore only be temporary palliatives and not real remedies for the book shortage. The 1968 Accra conferences, organized by Unesco on book development in Africa recommended that national councils of book production should be formed in order to solve the "book famine" situation, especially in rural areas where most African people live. As a result, Unesco established Yaounde Regional Centre for Book Development in Africa. However, up to now, only a few Book Development Councils have been established in response to the Accra's recommendation. The desired target is that between now and 1982 national councils for book promotion should have been established and become fully operational in most of the states participating in the activities of the Regional Centre for Africa.

In conclusion I would like highlight what has been saidi so far. The economic role of libraries as instruments of transition to the 21st century in Africa will very much depend on their indispensability as sources of information. Libraries, along with documentation centres and archives must cooperate together to ensure that there is an efficiently run national information system. Inevitably, computers will have to come to the aid of librarians, documentalists and archivists. However, the right type of technology must be used to achieve the desired impact. Priorities must be borne in mind in planning library, documentation and information services. Information for users mainly in the fields of science and technology (mainly in industry), economy and agriculture is likely to have a greater and more direct economic effect than in other fields. Apart from libraries, documentation centres and archives being coordinated nationally for maximum use of information, there is a greater need for them to cooperate with and to request for assistance from international agencies like UNESCO, FAO, UNIDO, F.I.D., IFLA, to mention only a few. That African countries should take advantage of international information systems cannot be over-emphasized.

For the proper functioning of libraries and documentation centres and archives, it is important that the authorities concerned should set aside adequate funds in accordance with, at least the minimum requirements suggested by experts. It is particularly important that training of high level manpower especially in information work should be given top priority. Last but not least is the importance of the promotion of the publication of books and other materials suitable for the African needs. Only by giving all these factors serious considerations, the necessary backing and priority can the role of libraries in the economic transition in Africa in the 21st Century be realized.

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